

IS DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION INCREASING THE ROMANIAN ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE EFFICIENCY?

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ABSTRACT

Having become a real and new relevant research stream and opening an ardent debate about the dematerialization of documents, digital transformation imposes a new organizational model. Very many researchers brought in their studies arguments having shown the changes that led to e-Government, both at a central public administration (CPA) level and the local public administration (LPA) one. Passing from a conversion of data and processes (digitization), a transformation of processes (digitalization) is necessary.

I am going to analyze and compare these concepts giving examples from the Romanian CPA and LPA.

KEYWORDS: *converting information, data, employee, models, reinventing.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has become a new relevant research stream (Casalino et al., 2019; Hinings et al., 2018; Nambisan et al., 2017; Yoo et al., 2012, Armenia et al., 2020, p.1) and the debate about dematerialization of documents is probably only at its beginning. The progressive increase of digital and computerized management of documents and processes cannot occur without a new digital technologies' strategy.

Several studies on digital transformation and digitalization and their impact on organizational processes as well on an effective e-Government have used Systems Thinking (ST) and System Dynamics (SD) approaches, through their simulation (Armenia et al., 2020). Many authors have focused on innovation, innovation flexibility or cooperation. What is really necessary is a combination of these approaches.

Which are the stakes and impacts of digital transformation? What does it really imply? It involves different mindsets and skillsets as compared to previous waves of transformative technology. On a theoretical level, the digital transformation presents an important interest such as the resource-based view or the theory of organization.

2. IS THERE A DEFINITION?

The digital transformation is defined as "digitalization" for certain researchers. It is a social phenomenon (Stolterman et al., 2004) a cultural evolution (Belk, 2013; Pardo et al., 2014, Rogers et al., 2011, Pînzaru et al., 2012, Henriette et al., 2016, p.2) and for companies a creation of business model (Rogers et al., 2011, Medina et al., 2013, Rothmann et al., 2014, Øiestad et al., 2014, Henriette, et al. 2016, p.2). For Henriette (2016) it remains "a disruptive or incremental change process".

On the other hand, dematerialization refers to 'the reduction of the throughput of materials in human societies (Van der Voet et al., 2004, Armenia et al. 2020, p. 2). In this study, the concept of 'dematerialization' is seen as the progressive increase in digital and computerized management of

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documents and processes within public and private bodies. The processes are believed to become more efficient. It implies not only a new strategy but also a specific organizational structure.

2.1 Classical activities of document management vs paper digitalization

Most researchers admit that ‘the implementation of digital transformation processes is a very complex and demanding activity’ (Barišić, et. al., 2021, p.359). This activity can be slowed down or stopped by different obstacles. Among these numerous possible obstacles, various studies identified employees’ digital skills, their mindsets and beliefs. There are, however trends towards jobs designed for employees who possess transferable skills and can use them in a broader context. Flexible work arrangements and flexible working hours and place of work will be designed.

The following question arises: does the digital administration code work in Romanian public administration (RPA)? It may be represented by:

- a) methods of reorganizing processes and document flow,
- b) a standardization, normalization and simplification of procedures,
- c) introducing the IT protocol.

2.2 Past into present when referring to e-government

A very detailed and honest analysis has shown the actual Romanian e-government status (Špaček, et al, 2020). At the strategy level, the document entitled ‘The National Strategy for Digital Agenda’ displays the objectives and the EU Agenda 2020. The last version of this document was approved in 2015 (Government decision 245/2015).

A series of measures meant to catch-up with other central and eastern European countries are included here. Still, the development of Romania’s electronic government and digitalization, in general, is behind schedule. The vast majority of objectives written in the aforementioned strategic document are not yet implemented.

For example, the Romanian Government enumerated 15 actions for the development of electronic government. None is fully implemented, and most of them do not show any progress whatsoever. It also stipulated 36 life events that should be realized as online services (from birth to enrolling in a library), but their implementation is also behind schedule (Špaček, et al, 2020, p.132).

The fact that the development of e-government in Romania is generally lagging behind the planned schedule, continues to be a vivid reality, even if e-government has gained attention in the EU pre-accession period. Some examples are:

- a) the development of national registries is at an early stage,
- b) a lack of central coordination (Romania does not have a central institution with the authority to decide and implement change in the public sector),
- c) no functioning interoperability projects (the national framework was approved only in December 2017 and after that nothing has moved towards implementation),
- d) very little political interest for this area,
- e) cities/towns began implementing their own (necessary limited and insular) online services; because of the Romanian public sector’s particularities, in which institutions are either local, decentralized or de-concentrated, institutions that reside in the same city cannot work together in most cases,
- f) citizens and public servants’ digital skills are low (Špaček, et al, 2020, p.143].

3. WHAT IS TO BE DONE FOR IMPLEMENTING DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION CHALLENGES?

There are several criteria for putting into practice digital transformation. Among them we can retain the following:

- a) multidisciplinary applicability,
- b) minimal costs,

- c) reduction of the need for experts,
- d) permanent sustainability and transparency of the system,
- e) focus on the individuals' growth,
- f) reduction of the subjectivity in evaluating employees.

Enabling the management of employees' professional development, several solutions may be taken into account (Nunes et al, 2020, Anh & Lee, 2020, Chán & Balková, 2022, p.5):

- a) facilitate and enable the mapping and development of employees' skills using modern tools and data base systems,
- b) introduce 'talent management',
- c) practice overall transparency of the system,
- d) focus on individual training;

The requirements for making the above solutions reality facts are passing from definitions of critical features, exact knowledge of partial steps of a task, individual's assignment of the tasks to operations using a combinatorial method, a triangle of human capital, intellectual capital and knowledge which may lead to open leadership and self-leadership.

The digitalization of public services in European countries sends a strong signal at the international, national, and local level on the need for change and digital transformation to move into an era of transparency, quality of public services, and the fight against corruption (Androniceanu, et al. 2022, p.6). Recent studies have underlined the most important benefits of digitization for civil servants at the local administration level: 'saving time by finding the information sought online, online meetings, online audience appointment, total control over the entry/exit of documents, real-time alerts on deadlines for resolving requests/documents, access from anywhere and anytime to the flow and history of a document, registration and archiving, the solution supports for the implementation of the internal managerial control system, unitary record of petitions, processes, contracts, requests submitted by citizens, irregularities within the institution' (Androniceanu, et al., 2022, p.9).

4. SOME SELECTED EXAMPLES OF ROMANIAN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION INSTITUTIONS

How do Romanian public administration institutions use digital tools? From the examples I have selected, these institutions attempted to demonstrate a link between offensive practices and the broader set of human rights.

The selected public administration institutions are: the Bucharest City Hall, the Iași Town Hall and the Craiova Town Hall.



Figure 1. The City Town of Bucharest – Website home page
Source: <https://www.pmb.ro/>, Primăria municipiului București © 2022.



Figure 2. The City Town of Iasi – Website home page
Source: <https://www.primaria-iasi.ro/> © Primăria Municipiului Iași



Figure 3. The City Town of Craiova – Website home page
Source: <https://www.primariacraiova.ro/> © 2023 Primăria Municipiului Craiova

There are common elements of the three selected sites but there are also differences:

Bucharest	Iași	Craiova
The town	About Iasi	Town Hall
The Mayor	Ttransparency	Local Council
Institutions	Audience program	Public information
Services	Online taxes	Decisional transparency
Maps	digital Town Hall (requests/claims)	Official Local Gazette
Culture	abandoned cars	IntenCity
Contact	news	Contact
Useful adresses	contact	
Others		
Assosiated pages		

Craiova Town Hall site displays a multilanguage option - RO, EN, FR, GE – and introduces a special festival - the IntenCity one. It is the first festival in Romania that brings together several emblematic styles of music in one unique experience: Oldies, Latino, Pop and Electronic Music.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Several ideas are to be shaped as conclusion:

- a) there is no doubt that the future of society, democracy, and government will be digital.
- b) the digital transformation of public service institutions is a strategic objective.
- c) comparisons between European states show that digitizing the administration is one of the most effective ways to reduce corruption in the public sector.
- d) state administrations should design and implement appropriate strategies and policies for the integration of large-scale digital applications.
- e) the digital transformation of public administration in the EU states continues to be influenced by a lot of factors as: technological, economic, administrative, managerial-strategic, educational, and political.
- f) digitalization of public service and administration sends a strong signal at the local and international level on the policymakers' determination to move into an era of transparency and the fight against corruption (Sieja & Wach, 2019, Androniceanu, et al., 2022, p.18).

On the other hand, there are also some other important conclusions regarding:

- a) organizational performance efficiency that should be improved through training and digital courses,
- b) processes of creating adaptability and transformability that are to be developed,
- c) general and specific digital competences that are to be improved,
- d) quality digital standards that are to be used,
- e) employees' creativity that is to be developed,
- f) ways to network and interact with digital platform operators,
- g) digital technologies and tools that should be promoted.

Last but not least digital transformation should lead to:

- a) a good governance that implies the quality of the public sector activities where managing is facilitating,
- b) an efficient public sector that turns investments into genuine results for citizens,
- c) a public sector quality that is obtained through consensus and trust,
- d) the study of public values that is gaining in importance.

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